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# BEHOLD

# The Lamb of God!

*BY REV. E. N. KIRK, D. D.*

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# BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!

BY

REV. E. N. KIRK, D. D.

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# Behold the Lamb of God!

"BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD, WHICH TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD." — John i. 29.

JOHN the Baptist had been for some time proclaiming to men that the world was to pass into a new stage of its history: a new dispensation was to commence; a new king was to set up his throne. And in order to be ready for the privileges and blessings of that kingdom, they must forsake the kingdom of Satan by repenting of sin, or ceasing to love any form of sin, and by forming an honest purpose to forsake it.

Like every other reformer, John gathered a band of disciples around him, who were learning the new truths God had committed to him. His object was not to set up a party, or found a sect, but simply to prepare the way for another person, of whom he frequently spoke to his followers.

John knew that he himself could not save them from their sins; but the one that was soon to come could do that wonderful work, which is more important to every one of us than to possess all the thrones and all the wealth this world contains, and all the honor men can bestow upon us.

And it is because it is so important,

reader, to you that you are now called to think upon the wonderful words which John uttered one day as he stood among his disciples. Not far off he saw Jesus Christ, whom he had recently baptized, approaching him. Immediately he directed the attention of the disciples to him; probably, as would be justifiable in this case, pointing with his finger that they might look directly at the person he wished them to notice.

And now observe the remarkable words he spoke:

"BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD, WHICH TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD."

What a wonderful title that is — Lamb of God! What a wonderful

description of him that is — which taketh away sin! But if we should merely wonder at these strange declarations, and inquire into their meaning, we should fail of the richest blessing God has to confer on us.

John is speaking to us to-day, just as he spoke to his disciples centuries ago. He is still pointing to that wonderful Being, and using that wonderful language. He is saying to you and to me, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Let us look, then, more closely into this matter, for it most deeply concerns us.

I. WHAT IS SIN?

Some persons mean by it the same

thing as vice. Others understand by it, crime. It includes both, and a vast deal besides. When we speak of vice, we mean that which is contrary to men's ideas of right. It is a vice to swear profanely, because men generally know that to be wrong. Drunkenness and lewdness and gambling are vices. But a man can be a great sinner without being guilty of a single vice. By crime we generally mean a violation of human law, which is at the same time a vice. Murder and stealing are crimes. But a man may abstain from every crime, and yet be a great sinner; because sin is a violation of God's law, as crime is a breach of human law. Whatever

God forbids us to do or be, it is a sin to be or do that. Whatever God requires us to be or do, to neglect being or doing that is sin.

The law of God has been given in two forms, — it was written on tables of stone, by his own finger, at Mount Sinai; and it is written, but much less distinctly and perfectly, on the human conscience. No man can read the law of God without at once perceiving by his own moral sense that it is right. If any one will take the ten commandments and read them over carefully, thinking out their meaning, he will see that the "law is good, and the commandment is holy, just, and good." Or, if he takes our

Saviour's abridgment or epitome of the law, he will see the same to be true of that. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and mind and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Is it not so, reader? Can anything be more true, more wise, more beautiful, more holy than that?

Now sin consists in doing what any of these ten commandments forbids, or in not doing what they require, in not loving our Creator with all the heart, and our neighbor or fellow-man as ourselves. So that sin is in every heart that does not so love; sin

is in the life that is not governed by such love ; sin is in every breath such a person draws, every moment he lives. It is aggravated by all the light God has given for knowing his duty ; all the mercy God has manifested in sustaining him, in prospering him, in warning and persuading him. Every Sabbath brings a new opportunity to repent. Every faithful book, faithful Christian, faithful preacher that urges God's claims on him, aggravates his sin. Every time he neglects to confess Christ before men, to pray, to celebrate the death of Christ ; all the bad influence he exerts as a parent, a friend, a member of society, makes his sin so much blacker. Think, then,

what an amount of sin a person at ten years of age may have committed; and how the amount is swelled at twenty; how the stream swells and blackens at thirty, at forty; rushing on toward that gulf and that Dead Sea where every stream of sin must come at death.

That is looking at sin in the past life. Then sin has another meaning in the present. It is a heart now resisting the claims of God, now rejecting his authority, now refusing to love and honor Christ. It is a wicked disposition of ungodliness and ingratitude cherished, a wicked habit of unbelief confirmed, a hard heart growing yet harder, a wicked purpose to

persevere in the course God forbids. That is present sin. But it has another meaning still: it takes hold on the future. This God has set forth in the most fearful terms human language can furnish. "The wages of sin is death. He that believeth not shall be damned. He that soweth to his flesh, shall, of the flesh, reap corruption."

Now we have answered the question, What is sin? Another arises here, —

II. How can sin be taken away?

John declared that the Lamb of God takes away sin. This will appear very plain if we recall something we

have said about sin. Let us first look at it as guilt. If a man commits murder, he is bound by the law to be executed. Guilt is the cord by which past iniquity binds one to future punishment. How then can this cord be broken, and the punishment deserved be avoided?

John here shows us how. You must remember that he was a Jew, speaking to Jews. They were accustomed from infancy, as their fathers had been, to see a man take a lamb from his flock, and lead it to the temple. There a priest took it from him, the offerer laying his hand upon the head of the innocent creature, as if to lay all his sins upon its head. Then

the priest poured out the blood of the lamb, and burned its fat upon the altar. If you will turn to the book of Leviticus, iv. 32–35, you will see that this was called an atonement, — something to make two parties *as one* who had been at variance. God forgave the man who offered the lamb for an atonement. Thus it is written: "And the priest shall make an atonement for his sin that he hath committed, and it shall be forgiven him." When a man is forgiven, his punishment is no more required. Some persons tell us that sin gets all its punishment as we go along — every sin. Then all that God has said about forgiving sin is a mockery. It has no meaning to

pray, as we do in our daily prayer, "forgive us our sins." If a man is condemned to live in prison for ten years, and he stays there through the ten years, it is not forgiveness to let him come out then. Forgiveness and punishment are just as opposite to each other as heat and cold ; paying a debt, and having a debt canceled without paying.

Now when John called Jesus Christ the Lamb of God, he knew how the Jews would understand him. If he had said, " Behold the Lamb of God, who is the meekest and gentlest of all men," they would have supposed that he was simply like a lamb in gentleness. But when he said, " Be-

hold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world," they understood him, and he intended they should understand him to say, "Here is not your lamb, but God's lamb, the atoning lamb, whose blood will be shed for you to secure the forgiveness of your sins. If you will confess your sins, and lay the hand of your faith on his head, God will forgive you all your sins; he will be reconciled to you, and give you the peace of God that passeth all understanding."

But there was another custom God gave that remarkable people, that they, and all other people through them, might learn how God forgives sin. You will find the account of it

in Leviticus xvi. 5–10, 15–22. There we find that on the solemn day of atonement, coming once a year, the high priest took two goats. One of them he killed, and sprinkled its blood upon the mercy-seat in the holy of holies. On the other he laid both his hands, confessing the sins of the people. Then a man appointed for the purpese led this scapegoat away into the wilderness, never to be seen by them again. This custom explains, in part, the expression, "taketh away the sin of the world;" and another expression, — "as far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

This is what the Holy Spirit in-

tended by leading John to call Jesus the Lamb of God; to show all men that Christ was going to be slain, "a lamb without blemish," innocent of all sin himself, for us, sinners. He was, as Paul expresses it, "made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." This is then God's way of delivering us from the consequences of our sins. They deserve eternal death. But through the Lamb of God they can be forgiven, and we saved from "the second death."

Yet that does not complete our salvation. Sin is more than wrong-doing; it is also wrong-being. A wicked act is one thing, a wicked

heart another and a worse thing. For the Saviour says that all wicked deeds come out of a wicked heart. Bad fruit comes from a bad tree. If the hands of a watch do not tell the truth, it is because the works inside are not true. In the heart is the seat of sin, its power. There is the polluting fountain. Hear the awful words of our Saviour: "Out of the hearts of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, pride. All these things come from within, and defile the man."

The heart, then, must be purified. "Make the tree good," the Saviour says. But we can not turn a bram-

ble-bush into a fig tree. We must be born again, newly created, the Scriptures say. We must have a new heart. But what is a new heart? It is a heart that desires and determines to obey God; to be holy; that repents of all the life of sin; that begins to love God; to trust in Christ; to resist temptation; to seek the glory of God; to care for the souls of others, and seek their salvation.

The Scriptures say that Christ is made unto us sanctification. He says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live." Jesus Christ is head over all things. All power in heaven and earth is in

his hands. He sends forth the Holy Spirit. He speaks in the Scripture. He controls all our life, and makes everything work together to the renewing of those in holiness who commit themselves to him. So that he takes away sin from the heart, and substitutes holiness. And at last we come off conquerors, and more than conquerors through him that loved us. And our very bodies he raises from the dust, and makes them "like unto his glorious body" by that power by which "he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

III. WHAT MUST WE DO THAT OUR SINS MAY BE TAKEN AWAY?

John has expressed it all in one word—*Behold!* But that word needs to be properly understood. It is one of many terms used in the Bible to describe that act by which the sinner obtains forgiveness and secures eternal life. "Look unto me and be ye saved," is one way of telling us what we are to do. When John said, "Behold the Lamb of God," he intended to have those men who heard him give up a great many notions they had, and begin to look at many things in a new light.

They were Jews, we have already noticed. They had their notions about the way to be saved, and we Gentiles have ours, which must alike be given

up. The Jew trusted to Abraham to save him: that is, he believed that he would be saved because he was descended from that great and good man. John says to them, No, turn your eyes from Abraham: he can not atone for your sins; only the Lamb of God can do that. He can not take away your unholy heart, and give you a heart prepared for heaven. Behold the Saviour, who can take away sin from the heart and conscience and life, and remove the curse of sin for ever.

The Jews imagined that being circumcised and offering lambs and bullocks in sacrifice would atone for their sins, and make them pleasing

to God. No, John says to them; you can bring no other lamb that will atone for your sins but the Lamb of God. You can not become holy by cutting the flesh. Your heart must be crucified by the cross of Christ. In other words, by giving yourself to the control of Christ, and, as he says, taking up your cross and following him, the heart is made holy.

Behold the Lamb of God, if you wish to be reconciled to God and made holy. But if beholding the Lamb of God will save us, what does that mean? Is it merely thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ, or believing that he takes away sin?

Beholding the Lamb of God, looking to Jesus, believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, eating the bread that came down from heaven, are all figurative descriptions of the same great act of the human mind by which it passes from death unto life, and by which it comes into the state where Christ can take its sins away.

It includes several views, feelings, and purposes. The chief is a desire to be saved from sin. Many desire to be delivered from the guilt of sin, who wish to continue in the practice of it. But the Saviour places in the foreground repentance, or the desire to cease from sinning. So long as any one cherishes his sins, outward or

inward, he can not behold the Lamb of God. Let us look at one of each kind. The Scripture direction is, "Let the wicked forsake his way." That is the first step. For instance, a man is in the habit of profane swearing: let him cease that vile practice instantly. Then the next requirement is, and let "the unrighteous forsake his thoughts." That goes from the outward to the inward. Whatever is wrong in the desires and purposes and plans must be abandoned. No half-way measures will answer. And there is the difficulty in the way of men's being saved. They do not desire to be holy in heart. Unless we do desire

a salvation from sin, the Lamb of God will not take it away.

But if we do, then we must behold him, attend to him, look upon him with all the powers of the soul concentrated. Behold the Lamb of God! Look in no other direction to be saved. Depend on no other being, object, or action, on church or priest or saint or angel, to save you. Behold your Saviour! There is no other. And he is almighty to save. Depend on nothing you have done or can do, even if it were to give your body to be burned for Christ; if it were tears enough to drown you; if it were prayers like Paul's. Behold the Lamb of God! So behold him

that you can see nothing apart from him. Behold him until you see full and eternal salvation in him.

Turn not your eye away; for that would be to crown all other sins with the damning sin of unbelief. Spurn not that wonderful Being. It is the eternal Son of God, stooping from heaven to walk on earth as a man of sorrows, that he may save you. He is beholding you at this moment. Your indifference, your unbelief, grieves him. Can you, then, continue to do it? Is your heart so hard, so desperate in its wickedness? Oh! turn not away from this wonderful Being. Whither will you look? To what or whom will you go? He is

now offered to save you from sin. He is calling you to commit your soul to his hand. He offers to take away your sin. And do you not wish it to be taken away? Can you carry the load any longer, and live and die under the dominion and defilement and curse of sin? Dare you turn in scorn and indifference from him? Remember that he is not only the Lamb of God, but also "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." He is King of kings, and Lord of lords. He invites with gentle persuasion. But he also commands with divine authority. And the sin of sins is the rejection of Christ.

Behold the Lamb of God! He

stands before you, — spotless, gentle, patient, submissive to every blow your sins have deserved; for when they smote him "he opened not his mouth." Have you looked into those eyes beaming with tenderness and compassion? Brother man, have you a heart to turn away in contempt or indifference? Pause and reflect what it means. He comes to "take away the sin of the world" — yours among others. And while he is offering to take yours away, he is listening to your heart that he may hear its response to his offer. And what is its answer?

And this little book is here before you to plead for your own precious

soul, and for your Saviour. He desires to save you. He came into the world for this very purpose. Yet he gains nothing by your repenting, unless it be the joy it gives him to see a soul delivered from sin, and the delight he experiences in our communion with him, and in our love and our gratitude.

But for you — what language can measure the importance of being delivered from sin, pardoned, adopted into the family of God? Who can tell how great an evil it is to have an unrenewed heart; to be every moment offending God, liable every moment to die, and yet be unfit for life or death?

Nor is it right that we should confine our attention wholly to ourselves. There is a Saviour to think of. You know how it grieves a parent who loves his child, who has done and sacrificed and suffered much for its benefit, to have that child entirely indifferent to his love. Think, then, who is it that is here called the Lamb of God. As one has expressed it — "The whole universe could never, in any other instance, show such a union of unsearchable riches and deep poverty; of sovereign authority and willing, entire subjection; of divine dignity and immense humiliation and condescension; of majesty and meekness, of holiness and love

to sinners, of justice and mercy, of desert of honor and happiness, with patient endurance of most complicated sufferings. . . . .

"Oh that all men would adore the Lamb that was slain, and present their loudest, sweetest songs of praise to him, in and through whom the prayers of saints arise as incense! . . . . Through his atoning sacrifice it consists with the glory of God to pardon all who trust in him. On this ground *you may come* to the throne of grace for all the blessings of salvation; nor does he want any other plea than that Christ has died.

"See that meek and gentle One coming unto John the Baptist! Who

is he? Listen to the answer: "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." Yes, it is the Lamb of Calvary, slain from the foundation of the world. The Messiah, the Prince of glory, the King of kings. He comes from the throne of eternal honors. He comes a paschal Lamb, an offering for sin, to suffer and die for a race of rebels. He knows he will be despised and rejected, and be made a curse for his heartless enemies: still he comes, the patient sufferer, waiting for that hour of amazing sacrifice. He was wounded and scourged that you and I might be healed. He was arrayed with scorn in the purple robe that

he might procure for us sinners the robe of righteousness and salvation. He stood speechless that we might have an *all-prevailing plea;* he thirsted that we might drink of the water of life; he bore the wrath of the Father that we might enjoy his favor; he was numbered with the transgressors that we might be 'equal with angels;' he died that we might live for ever.

"Upon our knees, then, let us survey his immeasurable love, that we may mourn for sin and hate it, rejoicing in our obligations to Jesus our Redeemer."

But you may inquire: "How *can* I behold him now? If I had lived i

John's day, and seen him with my own eyes, I might then have beheld him; but, how can I do it now?"

You may remember that after he had been raised to life, one of his disciples, Thomas, was unwilling to believe he was then alive unless he could see with his own eyes the nail-prints in his blessed hands, and handle them too. And when he saw the risen Saviour, he exclaimed, "My Lord, and my God!" Jesus' reply to him was: "Thou hast seen, and believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Men never were saved by beholding Jesus with their bodily eyes. "He that believeth shall be saved." You

are therefore to behold the Lamb of God by thinking of him, loving him, trusting yourself to his mercy.

See, then, distinctly what you may look to him for. You want pardon; to have God forgive you; to have all your sins blotted out; to have peace of conscience, such as no future light can disturb — such as will stand the test of death, judgment, and eternity. Look, then, to the Lamb of God, bleeding on the altar. And as you stand gazing at the cross, think of these words, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

You want a title to God's forfeited

favor, and to heaven. Behold the risen Redeemer! "He died for our sins, and rose again for our justification." You want a right to approach the infinitely holy One; to pray with the hope of being heard favorably. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." "He ever liveth to make intercession for us." Jesus glorified is our hope and our joy. Oh! rejoice in him, and say, with the Psalmist, "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." You want daily guidance and strength. The Lamb of God has become the Lion of Judah. His strength is made perfect in your weakness. He can give you repent-

ance, faith, love, patience, zeal — every good thing. You want a home in heaven: look to him who said, "In my Father's house are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you. . . . . I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also."

IV. WHERE MAY YOU BEHOLD HIM? In several places.

The first is his *Word.* There you will learn about all that you need to know at present. You will see him described as God, and as man. He is shown to us there as a Saviour, as a Ruler, commanding us what we are to do; as a Promiser, cheering us

with his most precious assurances; as an Example, showing us how to march to heaven, how to pray, how to suffer, how to conquer Satan, how to do good. "Search the Scriptures, for they testify of me."

You must find him too in his *providence.* He is constantly manifesting himself in your life, in the life of the church, of other men. You must learn to behold him there. If you are sick, he lays you low to do you good. If you recover from sickness, he raises you up. Behold him in all your life.

You must find him in his *ordinances.* Go to the prayer-meeting: he has promised to be there; and

there every sincere seeker finds him. Go to the sanctuary on the Sabbath: he is there.

You must find him in *your own heart.* The Holy Spirit reveals him there. And there we must find him, or nowhere. Behold him! Look into your own heart, and see how he is inviting you to trust him and love and serve him.

V. WHEN SHALL YOU BEHOLD HIM?

Now, the next hour, to-morrow, for ever. Fill your soul's eye with him. Think on him by day and by night. If you are chilled, and find your house damp, go out into the sunshine. Let its delightful beams

come all around you, and penetrate you. If your heart is cold, go out where the Sun of righteousness is shining. Behold him when you are looking at the beautiful works of his hands — for "all things were made by him;" when you rise up and lie down; when you are praising and when you are praying; when you are in health, and in sickness; and when the world goes smoothly, and when you are afflicted; when temptations come like fiery darts upon the soul; in the sanctuary, and by the wayside. And when you draw nigh to death, keep the eye fixed on the Lamb of God, until faith shall be changed into vision.

Behold the Lamb of God, as a Saviour — as your Saviour. You see how he met poor Bartimeus. The blind beggar could not purchase his favors; had not even eyesight to behold him. But he had soul-sight, which is faith. He believed without seeing. He beheld with his mind and heart. He trusted in Jesus, and Jesus saved him.

You see how it was with the miserable man dying on the cross by his side: he could not turn his head probably far enough to see Jesus with his eyes; but his heart beheld the Lamb of God, and he met Jesus that day in Paradise.

Dying man! how can your heart

refuse this precious direction? That meek and lowly Being came down from heaven for the very purpose of saving you. Oh! then, turn the whole force of your soul toward him.

He is a dying Saviour. Look, then, on his agony in the garden, where he bows beneath the load of our sins. Stand near, and hear him pray in agony. Follow him to the hill where his cross is to be put up. Behold him dying there that he might save our guilty, perishing souls.

Your immortal destiny turns on your treatment of him. If you look to him with a penitent heart, with a loving and confiding heart, with a heart that consecrates itself to his

service, it is well — it is blessed. Angels will rejoice.

But if you say you have not time thus to behold the Lamb of God, or if you have not a heart to do it, then you will find yourself soon among those who are thus described: "The kings of the earth, and the great men and the mighty men, and every bondman and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand!"

"HE HATH BORNE OUR GRIEFS AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS." — Isaiah liii. 4.

I lay my sins on Jesus,
The spotless Lamb of God;
He bears them all, and frees us
From the accursed load.
I bring my guilt to Jesus,
To wash my crimson stains
White in his blood most precious,
Till not a stain remains.

I lay my wants on Jesus —
All fulness dwells in him:
He heals all my diseases,
He doth my soul redeem.
I lay my griefs on Jesus,
My burdens and my cares:
He from them all releases;
He all my sorrow shares.

I rest my soul on Jesus,
This weary soul of mine:
His right hand me embraces,
I on his breast recline.

I love the name of Jesus,
  Immanuel, Christ, the Lord;
Like fragrance on the breezes,
  His name abroad is poured.

I long to be like Jesus,
  Meek, loving, lowly, mild:
I long to be like Jesus,
  The Father's holy child.
I long to be with Jesus
  Amid the heavenly throng,
To sing with saints his praises,
  To learn the angel's song.

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